

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN.

B. C. MOOMAW.

We frequently hear this fine phrase, which is doubtless meant by those who use it to express an ideal, beautiful indeed, but consciously remote, and more or less utopian. A diligent search would be wearied to find it crystalized in present conditions. It is true there are brotherhoods, there are communities, there are States with more or less interest in common, with more or less union of sentiment and feeling, with more or less unity of thought and action, with more or less mutual affection. Thanks to a humanitarian creed we have climbed up a considerable distance from the individualism which marks the more primitive forms of society; but after all this is said it yet remains true that very little brotherhood exists anywhere which is not limited and modified by as much self seeking as the law of public sentiment will allow.

Upon the whole, the progress which mankind has made toward brotherhood amounts to little more than a compact of mutual protection against the impulse of mutual destruction which is the legitimate, or rather the ultimate fruit of the essential selfishness of unregenerate human nature.

Let us take the most earnest and most persistent system of brotherhood ever introduced into the world, and note the result of eighteen centuries trial of it. There is no doubt that Christ reversed the doctrine of Cain, and taught that man was his brother's keeper, that the strong should bear the burdens of the weak, and that in respect to the enjoyment of providential blessings there should be equality between all. There is furthermore no doubt that he denounced, not only the fundamental spirit of selfishness, but all those outward, and material forms of selfishness which have in all ages ravaged the race, blotted out the sentiments of humanity, and converted the world into a hideous battle ground of contending passions.

But what is the verdict of history? What frightful panorama does the record of the past present to view? The nations known as Christian have for centuries done their full share of Cain business, have they not? The Pagans have by no means held a monopoly of slaughter. The wars of our Christian civilization have been as gory as any ancient holocaust where the doctrine of hate and murder was openly proclaimed as the noblest aspiration and highest duty of man.

Go through our parks, cemeteries, public squares, capitols, and see the statues and monuments raised to the statesmen

who made war, and to the generals who fought its bloodiest battles. Glory crowns the gory hero as the favorite whose brazen brow most deserves the radiance of her resplendent smile.

But if you say that this is not a fair test of the confident assertion of brotherhood, or of that system of fraternity whose divine origin and hence divine potency none will deny, let us differentiate between the Christian and pagan elements of our nominally Christian community, and see what better comfort we can find.

Here, indeed, among those who acknowledge the Elder Brother we find much talk of brotherhood, but how long has it been since no jealousy, no hate, no zeal of mutual detraction and mutual denunciation exceeded that of contending sects? And when that abominable war of the sixties rent in twain this most enlightened of all nations, even those who were rocked in the same ecclesiastical cradle turned the rifle and the cannon against each other, and went before God dripping with each other's blood. So far from having power to impose upon the nation the mandates of that brotherhood of man which Christ taught, and which they professed, the distinctly Christian elements of the country went over almost bodily to the distinctly pagan elements, and with one purpose and one hand poured forth a red oblation to the god of war.

But if it is objected that this is an unfair test because it is made in the flood tide of abnormal and insane passions, let us turn to the piping times of peace and witness the relentless conflict between brother and brother which political economy has dignified with the name of competition. The strong brother, strong either in larger capital, greater talent or superior skill, is not only willing but eager to diminish and perhaps destroy the business of the weaker brother, annex his property, annihilate his capital and absorb his living. In effect he is not only willing but eager to add to his luxuries by depriving his weaker brother of the comforts, and perhaps of the necessities of life, and move into a more splendid mansion on the same day that his brother is forced to take a poorer one.

By that most ingenious device known as interest the rich saint is quite content to live in idleness and luxury on the labor of the poor. In theory he loves his neighbor as himself, but he rides while the other walks, he educates his own children thoroughly, while the children of his neighbor are denied that priceless blessing, he sustains his sons at the university and his daughters at the seminary in com-

fort on the hard labor of his neighbor's sons and daughters, from the very first day that they are able to perform productive labor.

In addition to this doom of lifelong ignorance, poverty and drudgery, the poor burden bearers must bear the humiliation of social ostracism. They must be shut out of the elegant parlor, they must be excluded from the social gathering, they must be called "common people" "shiftless," "improvident," "boors," "hinds," and bear other epithets of contempt which the rich brother has invented to excuse his selfishness and neglect. Whole generations of harsh neglect and hopeless toil have robbed him of ambition, robbed him of intellectual life, made him in many instances improvident, because he could see no prospect of deliverance from this iron environment; and yet being the helpless victim of circumstances over which he has never had any control, he is blamed as if his condition was the product of his own deliberate choice.

When at last he is no longer able to bear the double burden which has crushed him and his father before him, society provides for him a contemptible asylum so saturated with popular opprobrium that the most destitute and miserable creature would rather die than avail himself of its shelter.

If all these indictments be just, I think we are ready to conclude that the era of the brotherhood of man has not yet arrived, and in the ordinary course of events, judging from past progress and present conditions, will not arrive for some centuries to come.

We do not present these views because we are pessimistic, but to undeceive that complacent conceit and self congratulation which has taken possession of men's minds, as if the great humanitarian task was all but accomplished. Society is somewhat like the typical boy who when an unusually tedious task is assigned him, delivers a little energetic work, perhaps, and then imagines that the business is accomplished.

The business is by no means accomplished, and in the ordinary course of events there is much more reason for despair than for hope. But the ordinary course of events is destined sooner or later, perhaps sooner than we imagine, to a violent interruption, and then, when a long absent one returns, when the champion of the oppressed reigns, the transcendent dream of universal brotherhood shall bloom into a practical and most blessed reality.